

Hunt for missing girl into 4th day

By WILLIAM KLEINKNECHT
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Police canvassed Westerleigh homes yesterday as the search continued for a 12-year-old Down's syndrome girl who disappeared from her neighborhood on Thursday — perhaps in the company of a middle-aged mentally retarded man she met on the street.

More than a dozen officers went door-to-door seeking information on Jennifer Schweiger, who is afflicted with Down's syndrome and a congenital heart condition that should have kept her from

walking very far.

The child, described as 4 feet 3 inches tall and 65 pounds with brown hair and hazel eyes, was last seen Thursday evening as she walked on Jewett Avenue, a block from her Wardwell Avenue home.

She wore a pink Sesame Street T-shirt and pastel-colored shorts and was carrying a yellow pocketbook.

Sgt. Jay Friedman said officers were focusing door-to-door interviews on the neighborhood surrounding Wardwell Avenue but would broaden their radius if the search continued.

Police directed the search using a map posted in a temporary command post police had set up Friday in a firehouse at the corner of Jewett Avenue and Markham Place.

No clues to the child's disappearance had turned up as of last night. Police would not confirm reports that detectives had assembled a lineup of people matching the description of a middle-aged man spotted walking with the child late Thursday, when she was last seen.

Both police and residents described

the man as 5-foot-11 and slightly built with a bald spot on the back of his head, was apparently mentally retarded and frequently had searched for returnable bottles in the neighborhood.

The dense community of neat single-family homes that surrounds Wardwell Avenue was busy with police officers and cruising automobiles as the search continued yesterday.

A crowd of friends and neighbors kept vigil outside the Schweiger home as

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Jennifer Schweiger

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Jennifer—

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automobiles streamed by reporting their progress. The child's parents declined to be interviewed, but friends said their initial optimism about the search had begun to fade.

"I think that today has really taken its toll," said a friend. "We're heading into 48 hours that she's been gone."

In addition to the police effort, some 60 volunteers assembled by Richmond County React cruised Mid-Island neighborhoods in automobiles, and dozens of others stopped by the command post to offer assistance.

"Many people are calling up with information and asking what they can do to help," Friedman said.

Friedman added that a New York State Trooper and a bloodhound had been dispatched to search the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook on Friday, but with negative results.

Police said the search resumed at the center at 1 p.m. yesterday



ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY CARANNANTE

An unidentified detective and New York State Trooper Jerry O'Hearn, with bloodhound Sasha, search for missing Jennifer Schweiger.

and was continued through the night and into this morning.

Those who have information on the child's whereabouts are urged

to dial a 24-hour number set up at the temporary headquarters: 447-4168. All information will be kept confidential.